

Message Text

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PAGE 01 WELLIN 03480 110418Z

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3811

C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 03480

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT--SUBPARA 4(D) ADDED)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, NZ

SUBJECT: PROPOSED AFL-CIO INVITATION TO NEW ZEALAND

LABOR LEADER

REF: STATE 186523

1. LABATT UNDERSTANDS THAT AFL-CIO HAS ALREADY EXTENDED INVITATION, THROUGH FOL, TO FRANCIS B. (FRANK) THORNE, GENERAL SECRETARY OF NZ CLOTHING WORKERS ASSOCIATION, TO ATTEND SEPTEMBER MEETING ON J. P. STEVENS. THORNE REPRESENTS SOME 16,000 CLOTHING AND TEXTILE TRADE EMPLOYEES AND IS AFFILIATED WITH INTERNATIONAL TEXTILE, GARMENT AND LEATHER WORKERS' FEDERATION.

2. LOU ARMITAGE IS GENERAL SECRETARY OF NEW ZEALAND WOOLEN MILL, CARPET AND HOSIERY WORKERS ASSOCIATION NOT REPEAT NOT TEXTILE WORKERS AS DESCRIBED REFTL. ARMITAGE REPRESENTS APPROXIMATELY 8,000 WORKERS AND IN PARTICULAR 300-ODD WORKERS OF THE FOXTON NEW ZEALAND PLANT OF STEVENS BREMMER (NZ) LTD. (FIFTY PERCENT OWNED BY J. P. STEVENS). PRINCIPAL PRODUCTS OF FOXTON PLANT ARE WOOLEN CARPETING AND SOME TEXTILES. (SUSPICION EXISTS IN NEW ZEALAND TRADE UNION CIRCLES THAT J. P. STEVENS HAS WIDER INTERESTS IN NZ THAN JUST ITS FOXTON PARTNERSHIP.)
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3. AS AFL-CIO MAY KNOW, APPROPRIATE NEW ZEALAND WORKER REPRESENTATION AT J. P. STEVENS CONFERENCE HAS BEEN SUBJECT OF SOME PUBLICITY IN WELLINGTON-BASED PRESS AND APPARENTLY THE CAUSE OF CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF RESENTMENT ON PART OF ARMITAGE FOR THE SELECTION OF THORNE TO ATTEND. LABATT UNDERSTANDS FOL PRESIDENT SKINNER HAS WRITTEN

GEORGE MEANY ON THIS.

4. IN OPINION OF LABATT, FOLLOWING ARE SALIENT POINTS FOR AFL-CIO TO KNOW.

(A) THORNE, AS GENERAL SECRETARY OF CLOTHING WORKERS, REPRESENTS 16000 WORKERS WHO PRODUCE BULK OF PRODUCT LINE WITH WHICH J. P. STEVENS IS ASSOCIATED IN STATES. HIS UNION IS CLOSEST EQUIVALENT OF U. S. TEXTILE/GARMENT WORKERS. THORNE IS MODERATE MEMBER OF FOL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND FRIEND OF U. S. HIS ATTENDANCE AT SEPTEMBER MEETING IN WASHINGTON HAS ALREADY BEEN ANNOUNCED BY FOL AND THORNE'S OWN UNION. THORNE WOULD SUFFER GREAT PERSONAL EMBARRASSMENT IF INVITATION WERE WITHDRAWN ALTHOUGH SUCH A SITUATION WOULD LIKELY NOT DISPLEASE SIR TOM SKINNER WHO HOLDS NO FONDNESS FOR THORNE. THE APPEARANCE OF THORNE HAVING BEEN UNDERCUT IN SUCH A SITUATION WOULD BE ALMOST INEVITABLE.

(B) ON OTHER HAND, ARMITAGE DOES HOLD TRUMP CARD OF BEING SOLE REPRESENTATIVE OF WORKERS AT THE ONE KNOWN J. P. STEVENS-RELATED PLANT IN NEW ZEALAND. ARMITAGE AND HIS MEMBERSHIP HAVE ADVISED FOL THAT SHOULD THORNE ATTEND WASHINGTON MEETING, THORNE WILL NOT BE SPEAKING FOR WOOLEN MILL WORKERS AND SPECIFICALLY NOT FOR FOXTON PLANT WORKERS. ARMITAGE IS CONSIDERED TO BE A RESPONSIBLE, THOUGH NOT AGGRESSIVE, TRADE UNIONIST WHO REPRESENTS HIS WORKERS WELL. CONFIDENTIAL

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HE HAS HAD VERY LITTLE ASSOCIATION WITH THE U. S. BUT WOULD ALSO BE CONSIDERED A MODERATE RATHER THAN LEFTIST TRADE UNION LEADER. HE IS NOT LIKELY TO ADVANCE TO GREATER THINGS IN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. IN DISCUSSIONS IN WASHINGTON WE WOULD ANTICIPATE THAT HE WOULD BE RELIABLE AND NYOOOPERATIVE.

(C) LABATT KNOWS OF NO REPEAT NO REASONS, INCLUDING VISA CHECKS, WHY ARMITAGE SHOULD NOT BE INVITED.

(D) IN SHORT, IF MEETING IS TO CURTAIL USE OF J.P. STEVENS EXPORTS IN NEW ZEALAND, THORNE IS AFL-CIO'S MAN. IF IT IS DIRECTED AT STEVENS' INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS, ARMITAGE IS THE ONE. BUT FROM POINT OF VIEW OF BOLSTERING MODERATE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP IN FOL, LABATT IS SURE AFL-CIO WILL NOT WANT TO DO SOMETHING WHICH WOULD UNDERCUT THORNE, 8.E. AN INVITATION TO ARMITAGE SHOULD NOT BE AT EXPENSE OF THORNE. SELDEN

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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
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